DATELINE #72 NEW YORK APRIL 21, 1976
ALICE RICHMAN SCHACHNER

NEW YORK'S MUNICIPAL ART SOCIETY
(VOICED PIECE, INSERTS IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR: AND NOW THE VOICE OF AMERICA PRESENTS... DATELINE ...ANOTHER IN THE SERIES OF PROGRAMS ABOUT PEOPLE, PLACES AND EVENTS IN THE UNITED STATES. TODAY, OUR DATELINE IS NEW YORK CITY AND OUR STORY -- FROM ALICE RICHMAN SCHACHNER -- IS ABOUT AN ORGANIZATION FORMED ABOUT EIGHTY-FIVE YEARS AGO TO IMPROVE THE LIFE OF THAT METROPOLIS. LIKE NEW YORK ITSELF, THE MUNICIPAL ART SOCIETY HAS CHANGED WITH THE TIMES.

VOICE: IN ITS EARLY YEARS THE SOCIETY'S ACTIVITIES CONCENTRATED ON WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED "CIVIC EMBELLISHMENT." IT SPONSORED DESIGN COMPETITIONS FOR ARCHITECTURE AND STREET FIXTURES, PRESENTED GIFTS OF SCULPTURE AND FOUNTAINS TO PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND ENCOURAGED RESIDENTS TO IMPROVE THEIR OWN STREETS WITH A TREE-PLANTING PROGRAM. BUT, NEW YORK WAS GROWING VERY RAPIDLY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. AND IT SOON BECAME OBVIOUS THAT EVEN THE MOST SKILLFUL AND ENERGETIC PRIVATE EFFORTS WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH TO STEM THE TIDE OF URBAN DECAY.

SO THE MUNICIPAL ART SOCIETY MOVED TO A POSITION OF CIVIC "WATCHDOG." IT URGED AND INFLUENCED THE CREATION OF A CITY PLANNING COMMISSION. ITS MEMBERS SPOKE OUT AGAINST THE DESTRUCTION OF HISTORICAL LANDMARKS AND IT FOUGHT TO PRESERVE THE CITY'S PARKS. NEW YORK'S EARLIEST ANTI-NOISE AND POLLUTION REGULATIONS WERE A RESULT OF THE SOCIETY'S

VOICE: (CONT'D) EFFORTS. TODAY, THE SOCIETY IS AN ORGANIZATION OF DEDICATED "ACTIVISTS" WHO ARE WORKING ON A BROAD RANGE OF ISSUES. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MARGOT WELLINGTON FEELS THAT NEW YORKERS ARE NO LONGER WILLING TO PLAY A PASSIVE ROLE IN THEIR CITY'S DEVELOPMENT. IF A NEW BUILDING PROJECT IS ABOUT TO GO UP, THEY WANT TO KNOW, VERY SPECIFICALLY, HOW IT WILL AFFECT THEIR LIVES AND THE LIFE OF THEIR COMMUNITY. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS ESSENTIAL, SHE SAYS, BUT IT MUST GO HAND-IN-HAND WITH HUMAN NEEDS:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- WELLINGTON

"ONE EXAMPLE THAT COMES TO MY MIND IS ROCKEFELLER CENTER. NOW THERE YOU HAVE VERY TALL BUILDINGS (AND) YOU HAVE ECONOMIC HEALTH THAT HAS LASTED FOR FORTY YEARS. YOU HAVE COMMERCE BEING WELL SERVED AND THEREBY, PEOPLE'S JOBS CREATED AND PRESERVED. BUT AT THE SAME TIME YOU HAVE PUBLIC ART, YOU HAVE AMENITIES, YOU HAVE THE SKATING RINK, YOU HAVE RESTAURANTS, YOU HAVE PLAZAS. YOU HAVE LANDSCAPES AND YOU HAVE EVENTS THAT PLEASE THE PUBLIC. NOW, THEY ARE NOT CONTRADICTORY. IT'S BETTER BUSINESS FOR ALL OF THESE THINGS TO BE PART OF A BUSINESS SETTING. THAT'S THE KIND OF APPROACH, I THINK, THAT THE MUNICIPAL ART SOCIETY APPLAUDS AND ATTEMPTS TO HAVE CARRIED OUT IN NEW DEVELOPMENTS."

VOICE: NEW YORKERS HAVE THE REPUTATION OF BEING A COSMOPOLITAN PEOPLE, AT HOME IN THE BIG CITY AND KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT ITS USE. BUT MARGOT WELLINGTON THINKS THAT MOST PEOPLE ARE CREATURES OF HABIT. A PERSON MAY WORK IN THE WALL STREET AREA FOR YEARS. BUT IT WILL NEVER OCCUR TO HIM TO FIND OUT WHAT THE FINANCIAL DISTRICT HAS TO OFFER AFTER BUSINESS HOURS. PEOPLE SIMPLY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE MISSING:

TAPE: CUT TWO -- WELLINGTON

"THE MAGIC OF NEW YORK IS THAT YOU CAN GO DOWN TO WALL STREET ON A SUNDAY WHEN NOBODY'S GOT TO GO THERE, WHEN IT'S ONLY PEOPLE WHO WANT TO RIDE THEIR BICYCLES IN PEACE AND PEOPLE WHO WANT TO TAKE THEIR CHILDREN TO THE SOUTH STREET SEAPORT AND DISCOVER A COMPLETELY NEW PLACE. IT'S ONE OF THE MOST DELIGHTFUL SPOTS IN NEW YORK CITY. GREENWICH VILLAGE HAS ITS SORT OF HONKY-TONK AREAS BUT TWO OR THREE BLOCKS AWAY FROM THAT ARE QUITE RESIDENTIAL STREETS THAT LOOK VERY MUCH THE WAY THEY MUST HAVE LOOKED ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO. WE DO TRY. WE HAVE A SERIES OF WALKING TOURS AND BUS TOURS WHICH WE GIVE DURING THE NICE WEATHER SEASONS. AND WE TRY TO GET PEOPLE TO GET OFF THE BEATEN PATH AND TO REALLY TAKE A CHANCE."

VOICE: THE MUNICIPAL ART SOCIETY NOW HAS TWELVE HUNDRED MEMBERS. THEY ARE LAWYERS, ARTISTS, ARCHITECTS, WRITERS AND CITY PLANNERS. SOME ARE JUST CONCERNED CITIZENS WHO WANT TO IMPROVE THE LIFE OF THE CITY THEY LOVE.

ANNCR: YOU'VE BEEN LISTENING TO DATELINE, THE WEEKLY VOICE OF AMERICA PROGRAM ON PEOPLE, PLACES AND EVENTS IN THE UNITED STATES. JOIN US AGAIN NEXT ------ (AT THIS TIME) FOR ANOTHER... DATELINE. THIS IS ----------.

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